



WISCONSIN

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Division of Economic Support
Bureau of Welfare Initiatives

**TO: Economic Support Supervisors
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Non W-2 ☐ W-2 ☒ CC ☐

PRIORITY: High

SUBJECT: W-2 24-MONTH TIME LIMIT AND CASE MANAGEMENT

**CROSS REFERENCE: W-2 Manual
BWI Operations Memo 99-49**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to give W-2 agencies and Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs) guidelines and suggestions for working with W-2 participants approaching the end of their 24-month time limit and working with W-2 participants who have reached their 24-month time limits.

Highlights Of Memo

- The case management strategies contained in this memo are strategies that W-2 agencies have been using since the implementation of W-2, and even earlier by some service providers. These strategies are revisited here so that local agencies can review and strengthen their own internal policies, procedures and strategies for working with participants approaching their time limit and those that have reached their time limit.
- Aggressively communicating the time limit message will help ensure participants view time limits as a very real and firm deadline rather than as a "distant change."
- At a minimum, FEPs must discuss the time limit policy at application (it is included in the Participation Agreement), eligibility reviews and each W-2 placement change.
- From the moment the participant begins participating in W-2, they should be urged to increase their work skills and enter the workforce as soon as possible, thus saving months of eligibility for future use.
- During the time period in which the end of the 24-months is becoming a reality, the time limit discussions should focus primarily on the number of months the participant has remaining and, secondarily, on the anticipated end date. By placing the primary focus on the number of months

remaining, the FEP is reminding the participant that, if at all possible, s/he should enter the workforce as quickly as possible and save remaining months for future use.

- The W-2 time limit policy is one of a variety of policies designed to require, encourage or assist participants in finding jobs before W-2 benefits expire and must be used in conjunction with other W-2 policies in order to motivate participants to find employment as soon as possible.
- At a point no later than when the participant reaches the 18th month of eligibility in a W-2 employment position, the time limit discussion **must** include a discussion regarding extensions because participants have a right to know what an extension is and the criteria under which an extension may be granted.
- If the FEP is working with a noncompliant W-2 participant, the discussion regarding extensions and specifically regarding the extension criteria may provide the motivation a participant needs to cooperate.

BACKGROUND

By design, W-2 agencies are given a great deal of flexibility in administering the W-2 program and providing case management services to its participants. The case management strategies contained in this memo are strategies that W-2 agencies have been using since the implementation of W-2, and even earlier by some service providers. These strategies are revisited here so that local agencies can review and strengthen their own internal policies, procedures and strategies for working with participants approaching their time limit and those that have reached their time limit.

CASE MANAGING PARTICIPANTS APPROACHING THEIR TIME LIMITS

Discussing Time Limits With W-2 Participants

How effective a time limit policy is in motivating recipients to alter their behavior depends upon a number of factors. It depends upon how often the time limit message is communicated to the participant, the content of the message communicated to participants in their day-to-day interactions with their FEP and the enforcement of other W-2 policies in conjunction with time limits.

1. Frequency

Time limits are more than terminating benefits when a participant reaches a specific point. Time limits are intended to motivate participants to move toward self-sufficiency well before that point. Aggressively communicating this message will help ensure participants view time limits as a very real and firm deadline rather than as a “distant change.” By design, communicating this message frequently to participants is possible (and expected) under W-2 due to the smaller caseloads and the increased contact between participants and their FEPs.

At a minimum, FEPs must discuss the time limit policy at application (it is included in the Participation Agreement), eligibility reviews and each W-2 placement change. Additionally, participants are notified of the months of eligibility used on each W-2 clock through CARES notices. As a participant approaches his or her time limit, the contact between participant and FEP should increase as should the discussions regarding time limits. Reinforcing the message will increase the sense of urgency time limits create and continue to motivate the participant. Each discussion must be documented in CARES in case comments.

2. Content

Time limits stress mutual responsibility: government provides support and services designed to promote employment while, in return, participants are expected to prepare for and enter employment. The goal is to increase participants' employability and opportunities for employment and reduce reliance on government programs. Therefore, from the moment the participant begins participating in W-2, s/he should be urged to increase their work skills and enter the workforce as soon as possible, thus saving months of eligibility for future use. This should be done at the frequency described above.

During the time period in which the end of the 24-months is becoming a reality, the time limit discussions should focus primarily on the number of months the participant has remaining and, secondarily, on the anticipated end date. By placing the primary focus on the number of months remaining, the FEP is reminding the participant that, if at all possible, s/he should enter the workforce as quickly as possible and save remaining months for future use. Although there should be some emphasis on anticipated end dates, too much emphasis on the end date indirectly implies that the participant continuously receive W-2 until s/he reaches the limit and, in return, this will not motivate the participant to respond by saving time.

3. Reinforcing Other Policies

The W-2 time limit policy is one of a variety of policies designed to require, encourage or assist participants in finding jobs before W-2 benefits expire. The time limit policy is not meant to be a stand-alone policy. Used in conjunction with other W-2 policies, the time limit policy will help motivate participants to find employment as soon as possible. By enforcing other policies, we can reduce the number of participants who reach their time limits without jobs or other sources of support. By not enforcing other W-2 policies, W-2 agencies are creating a difficult choice between granting extensions and terminating benefits.

Other policies include:

a. Requiring full participation

For example, requiring participants to participate for up to 40 hours per week (30 hours in work experience and 10 hours of education and training for CSJ participants and 28 hours of work experience and 12 hours of education and training for W-2 T participants).

b. Holding participants accountable for their actions

For example, applying hourly reductions or strikes for nonparticipation. Also, for example, in order to remain eligible for W-2, an applicant or participant must apply for other resources, such as Supplemental Security Income, the Job Training Partnership Act, etc.

c. Offering or referring to expanded appropriate services

For example, mental health counseling, formal mental health or physical health assessments, Alcohol and Other Drug Addictions services, parenting classes and post-employment support.

None of these policies alone, including time limits, will be effective. They must all be applied together under intensive case management.

Discussing Extensions With W-2 Participants

To reduce the likelihood that children will be harmed by time limits, Wisconsin law allows for extensions to the 24-month employment position time limits. Extensions allow parents, for a short time, to continue to work towards unsubsidized employment, another rung of the W-2 ladder or to identify other sources of support.

W-2 agencies are given some discretion in how they communicate the time limit message to participants. However, at the appropriate time, the time limit discussion **must** also include a discussion regarding extensions. Participants have a right to know what an extension is and the criteria under which an extension may be granted. By policy, a discussion regarding extensions must take place no later than when the participant reaches the 18 month of eligibility in any one W-2 employment position. (See Operations Memo 99-49). W-2 agencies may choose to discuss this extension possibility earlier than 18 months.

If used correctly, employment position extensions are a good case management tool. It is very important that FEPs give accurate and complete information on extensions without weakening the participant's motivation by creating a perception that time limits are not firm. Participants who are uncertain about

whether they will meet extension criteria are more likely to focus their energy on finding a job rather than trying to fit the criteria for an extension.

If the FEP is working with a noncompliant W-2 participant, the discussion regarding extensions and specifically regarding the extension criteria may provide the motivation a participant needs to cooperate.

FEPs must make it clear to all participants that a person is not entitled to an extension. By signing the Participation Agreement, the participant and the W-2 agency agreed to a 24-month time period in which the agency would provide services to the individual in a W-2 employment position. There is no commitment to continue these services after 24 months. Therefore, a participant must meet the extension criteria in order to qualify. The FEP should stress that full cooperation with all W-2 requirements is required in order to: a) Find a job, move up the ladder or find other resources in order to prepare for the possible loss of benefits; and b) Avoid disqualifying themselves from extensions. By doing so, participants will understand that extensions are not automatic.

W-2 agencies can expect an increased interest in extensions by their participants once the message regarding extensions reaches the community. For that reason, agencies are encouraged to review and strengthen their internal policies and procedures on discussing W-2 employment position time limit extensions with participants to ensure accuracy and consistency in communicating this information.

Case Management Strategies

There are a number of case management strategies agencies can use in working with participants approaching their time limit:

1. Reassessing participants in an attempt to uncover additional barriers preventing success in their current employment position.

This can be done through informal assessments, formal assessments, visiting participants at their worksites or homes. If a FEP uncovers additional information which would warrant a change in a participants' W-2 employment position, the justification for the change should be documented fully in case comments.

Agencies can consider hiring or designating existing agency staff as an **SSI advocate**. These advocates assist participants with the SSI application process, accompany them to SSI appointments and may be designated as a representative which would allow them to receive any notice of action being taken on the SSI application. FEPs can also become a designated representative for their participants going through the SSI application process. By becoming a representative, the FEP would also be notified of any action taken on the SSI application. (See attached forms related to SSI).

2. Changing their approach to the doctor by explaining the philosophy of W-2 and time limited benefits.

Asking direct questions regarding what the participant **can** do and whether the participant **can** participate in specific activities will move the focus from "can't do" to "can do." (See attached model form that may be used in conjunction with the Medical Capacity form).

3. Staffings involving other service providers as well as community members
4. Reassigning FEPs or instituting a **FEP mentoring program** in an attempt to offer a fresh perspective on the case.

Reassigning the case to a new FEP or pairing a more experienced FEP with a less experienced FEP may provide new insight and solutions to addressing a particular participant's barriers.

CASE MANAGING PARTICIPANTS THAT REACH THE TIME LIMIT

As is true for all W-2 families, the safety of the participant's children as well as the participant themselves is an ongoing, primary concern for families that reach their time limit and are found not to qualify for an extension (See Operations Memo 99-49 for extension criteria). Again, W-2 agencies should emphasize in their internal policies appropriate case management practices for participants who reach the time limit and do not qualify for an extension. These practices should include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring participants are aware that although their cash assistance may be ending, they may still be eligible for food stamps and Medicaid. This includes setting up an appointment with the SSP to ensure timely processing, and accompanying the participant to the appointment with the SSP.
2. Providing a list of community services. The provision of information should be done through the partnership between the W-2 agency and the Children's Services Network (CSN). By law, each W-2 agency is required to develop a CSN which provides a link to community services for children and families.

At a minimum, the CSN must provide information about the following services:

- a. Charitable food centers
 - b. Charitable clothing centers
 - c. Subsidized and low-income housing
 - d. Transportation subsidies
 - e. Special services for children with disabilities
 - f. The state supplemental food program for women, infants and children (WIC)
 - g. Child care programs
 - h. Homeless shelters
 - i. Domestic abuse services
 - j. Workplace protections
 - k. Child welfare services
 - l. Public health and other health services
 - m. Other additions based on collaboration with child protective services
3. Agency staff must continue to be alert observers in order to identify whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect of the participant's child(ren) is occurring. As is expected for all W-2 cases, the FEP must make a report to the child welfare agency (CWA) if abuse or neglect of the participant's child(ren) is occurring. The CWA assesses reports of alleged child abuse and neglect in accordance with state standards. In any case where the CWA agency determines that the child is not safe and that in-home safety services would be insufficient to keep the child(ren) safe, the CWA would take the appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the child(ren).
 4. Evaluating the participant for eligibility for Welfare-to-Work or Community Reinvestment programs.
 5. Referring the participant to other resources and services within the community, e.g. Job Training Partnership Act services, vocational rehabilitation services, and job placement and career information through the Job Service and the Job Center system.